

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

ANTHONY MEEKS,)
)
Plaintiff,) Case No. 1:05-cv-172
)
v.) Honorable Wendell A. Miles
)
KENNETH McKEE,)
)
Defendant.)

OPINION

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

The Court has granted Plaintiff leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*. Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, PUB. L. No. 104-134, 110 STAT. 1321 (1996) (“PLRA”), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A; 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must read Plaintiff’s *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff’s allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, the Court will dismiss Plaintiff’s complaint for failure to state a claim.

Discussion

I. Factual Allegations

Plaintiff currently is incarcerated in the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility (IBC).

In his *pro se* complaint, he sues the following IBC employees: Warden Kenneth McKee, Deputy Warden Cathy Stoddard, Assistant Deputy Warden (ADW) Dave Johnson, ADW Richard Signs, OPHMT Supervisor Tim Nelson, P.C. II L. Mitchell, P.C. II D. Gallagher, Librarian Norm Pierce, Librarian Anna Estes, Assistant Resident Unit Manager (ARUM) A. Stewart, Sergeant Paul Gallert and Officer D. Alvarez.

Plaintiff raises several claims arising after his transfer to IBC on February 24, 2004.

Plaintiff first claims that he was erroneously classified to administrative segregation upon his arrival at IBC. Plaintiff was released from administrative segregation into the general population on March 18, 2004.

Second, Plaintiff alleges that he often found no librarian on duty at the IBC law library. As a result, Plaintiff “could not get some law materials or copies that is [sic] locked up in the librarian office.”

Plaintiff’s third claim concerns a major misconduct charge that he received on December 15, 2004. Plaintiff claims that he was asked to sign a form for his room key, which provided that he would be liable for a \$45.00 fee if he lost the key. Plaintiff indicated that he would accept the key, but refused to sign the form. A couple of days later, Officer Alvarez threatened Plaintiff that he would be disciplined if he did not sign the form. When Plaintiff again refused to sign the form, Alvarez gave him a major misconduct ticket for disobeying a direct order. Alvarez allegedly told Plaintiff that Deputy Stoddard told Alvarez to give Plaintiff the misconduct ticket.

Plaintiff was placed in segregation pending his misconduct hearing. On December 20, 2004, Plaintiff was found guilty of the offense following an administrative hearing. Plaintiff's request for rehearing was denied. Plaintiff states in his complaint, "I am now appealing the decision of the misconduct to your Court."

When Plaintiff was placed in administrative segregation on December 15, his excess property was packed by prison staff for storage. Upon his release, Plaintiff found that his footlocker had been damaged. In his grievance, Plaintiff asserted that the footlocker was damaged when "someone while packing my property push [sic] the door back to [sic] far."

For relief, Plaintiff seeks monetary damages. In addition, Plaintiff seeks an order directing the MDOC to expunge the misconduct conviction and to replace his footlocker.

II. Failure to State a Claim¹

A complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted when it is clear that no relief could be granted under any set of facts that could be proved consistent with the allegations of the complaint. *Jones v. City of Carlisle*, 3 F.3d 945, 947 (6th Cir. 1993). To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of

¹Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a), a prisoner bringing an action with respect to prison conditions under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 must exhaust available administrative remedies. See *Porter v. Nussle*, 534 U.S. 516 (2002); *Booth v. Churner*, 532 U.S. 731 (2001). Plaintiff provides several grievances concerning his claims. Because Plaintiff fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, the Court need not determine whether he properly exhausted his claims against Defendants. See 28 U.S.C. § 2254 (b)(2) ("An application for a writ of habeas corpus may be denied on the merits, notwithstanding the failure of the applicant to exhaust the remedies available in the courts of the State.")

substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

A. Administrative Segregation

Plaintiff claims that he was erroneously classified to administrative segregation for twenty-three days following his transfer to IBC. Plaintiff does not specifically assert a violation of his federal rights. At most, Plaintiff's allegations implicate his Fourteenth Amendment right to due process and his Eighth Amendment right against cruel and unusual punishment.

To determine whether segregation of an inmate from the general prison population involves the deprivation of a liberty interest protected by the due process clause, the court must determine if the segregation imposes an “atypical and significant” hardship on the inmate “in relation to the ordinary incidents of prison life.” *Jones v. Baker*, 155 F.3d 910, 811 (6th Cir. 1998) (quoting *Sandin v. Conner*, 515 U.S. 472, 483 (1995)). Under various circumstances, the Sixth Circuit has repeatedly found that confinement to administrative segregation does not present an “atypical and significant” hardship implicating a protected liberty interest. See *Jones*, 155 F.3d at 812-23 (two years of segregation while inmate was investigated for murder of prison guard in riot); *Rimmer-Bey v. Brown*, 62 F.3d 789, 790-91 (6th Cir. 1995) (inmate serving life sentence was placed in segregation after serving thirty days of detention for misconduct conviction of conspiracy to commit assault and battery); *Mackey v. Dyke*, 111 F.3d 460 (6th Cir. 1997) (one year of segregation after inmate was found guilty of possession of illegal contraband and assault and where reclassification was delayed due to prison crowding). Plaintiff's twenty-three day stay in segregation did not amount to an atypical and significant hardship and did not implicate a protected liberty interest.

Furthermore, Plaintiff's allegations fail to state a claim under the Eighth Amendment. The Eighth Amendment prohibits punishments that are not only physically barbaric, but also those which are incompatible with "the evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society," or which "involve the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain." *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 102-103(1976). To establish an Eighth Amendment claim, the prisoner must show that he was deprived of the "minimal civilized measure of life's necessities." *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 347 (1981). Restrictions that are restrictive or even harsh, but are not cruel and unusual under contemporary standards, are not unconstitutional. *Id.* Thus, federal courts may not intervene to remedy conditions that are merely unpleasant or undesirable.

Placement in segregation is a routine discomfort that is "'part of the penalty that criminal offenders pay for their offenses against society.'" *Hudson v. McMillian*, 503 U.S. 1, 9 (1992) (quoting *Rhodes*, 452 U.S. at 347; *see also Jones v. Waller*, No. 98-5739, 1999 WL 313893, at *2 (6th Cir. May 4, 1999)). Although it is clear that Plaintiff was denied certain privileges as a result of his administrative segregation, he does not allege or show that he was denied basic human needs and requirements. The Sixth Circuit has held that without a showing that basic human needs were not met, the denial of privileges as a result of administrative segregation cannot establish an Eighth Amendment violation. *See Bradley v. Evans*, No. 98-5861, 2000 WL 1277229, at *8 (6th Cir. Aug. 23, 2000); *Collmar v. Wilkinson*, No. 97-4374, 1999 WL 623708, at *3 (6th Cir. Aug. 11, 1999). Moreover, Plaintiff cannot bring an Eighth Amendment claim for emotional or mental damages because he does not allege a physical injury. *See* 42 U. S.C. §1997e(e); *see also Hudson*, 503 U.S. at 5; *Watson v. McClanahan*, No. 99-6124, 2000 WL 922899, at *2 (6th Cir. June 27, 2000); *Benson v. Carlton*, No. 99-6433, 2000 WL 1175609, at *1 (6th Cir. Aug. 9, 2000). As such,

Plaintiff fails to state an Eighth Amendment claim arising from his placement in administrative segregation.

B. Law Library

Plaintiff alleges that he often found no librarian on duty at the IBC law library. As a result, he “could not get some law materials or copies that is [sic] locked up in the librarian office.” Plaintiff’s allegations implicate his First Amendment right of access to the courts. It is well established that prisoners have a constitutional right of access to the courts. *Bounds v. Smith*, 430 U.S. 817, 821 (1977). The principal issue in *Bounds* was whether the states must protect the right of access to the courts by providing law libraries or alternative sources of legal information for prisoners. *Id.* at 817. The Court further noted that in addition to law libraries or alternative sources of legal knowledge, the states must provide indigent inmates with “paper and pen to draft legal documents, notarial services to authenticate them, and with stamps to mail them.” *Id.* at 824-25. An indigent prisoner’s constitutional right to legal resources and materials is not, however, without limit. In order to state a viable claim for interference with his access to the courts, a plaintiff must show “actual injury.” *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 349 (1996); *see also Talley-Bey v. Knebl*, 168 F.3d 884, 886 (6th Cir. 1999); *Knop v. Johnson*, 977 F.2d 996, 1000 (6th Cir. 1992); *Ryder v. Ochten*, No. 96-2043, 1997 WL 720482, *1-2 (6th Cir. Nov. 12, 1997). In other words, a plaintiff must plead and demonstrate that the shortcomings in the prison legal assistance program or lack of legal materials have hindered, or are presently hindering, his efforts to pursue a nonfrivolous legal claim. *Lewis*, 518 U.S. at 351-353; *see also Dellis v. Corrections Corp. of America*, 257 F.3d 508, 511 (6th Cir. 2001); *Pilgrim v. Littlefield*, 92 F.3d 413, 416 (6th Cir. 1996).

Plaintiff does not allege that the absence of a librarian during some of his visits to the law library resulted in actual injury to pending or contemplated litigation. Accordingly, Plaintiff fails to state a claim for denial of access to the courts.

C. Misconduct Conviction

Plaintiff challenges his major misconduct conviction for disobeying a direct order. The Supreme Court has held that a claim for declaratory relief and monetary damages that necessarily implies the invalidity of the punishment imposed, is not cognizable under § 1983 until the conviction has been overturned. *Edwards v. Balisok*, 520 U.S. 641, 648 (1997) (addressing allegations of deceit and bias on the part of the decisionmaker in a misconduct hearing). The Court relied upon *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477, 486-87 (1994), which held that “in order to recover damages for allegedly unconstitutional conviction or imprisonment, *or for other harm caused by actions whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid*, a § 1983 plaintiff must prove that the conviction or sentence has been [overturned].” *Edwards*, 520 U.S. at 646 (emphasis in original). As the Supreme Court recently has stated, “[t]hese cases, taken together, indicate that a state prisoner’s § 1983 action is barred (absent prior invalidation) – no matter the relief sought (damages or equitable relief), no matter the target of the prisoner’s suit (state conduct leading to conviction or internal prison proceedings) – *if* success in that action would necessarily demonstrate the invalidity of confinement or its duration.” *Wilkinson v. Dotson*, 125 S. Ct. 1242, 1248 (2005). Thus, where a prisoner’s claim of unfair procedures in a disciplinary hearing necessarily implies the invalidity of the deprivation of good-time credits, his claim is not cognizable under § 1983. *Id.*; see also *Bailey v. McCoy*, No. 98-1746, 1999 WL 777351, at *2 (6th Cir. Sept. 21, 1999) (collecting Sixth Circuit decisions applying *Edwards* to procedural due process challenges).

In *Muhammad v. Close*, 540 U.S. 749 (2004), the Supreme Court clarified that *Edwards* requires the favorable termination of a disciplinary proceeding before a civil rights action may be filed only in cases where the duration of the prisoner's sentence is affected. See *Johnson v. Coolman*, No. 03-1909, 2004 WL 1367271, at *1 (6th Cir. June 15, 2004), *cert. denied*, 125 S. Ct. 612 (2004). In other words, *Edwards* still applies where a plaintiff has lost good time as the result of the misconduct conviction. Under Michigan law, a prisoner automatically loses good time credits for the month of his major misconduct disciplinary conviction. See MICH. COMP. LAWS § 800.33. In addition, the warden may order forfeiture of previously accumulated credits in cases. *Id.* Plaintiff does not assert that he did not lose good time credit for the month of his conviction. Accordingly, Plaintiff's claim remains noncognizable under § 1983 because a ruling on the claim would, if established, necessarily imply the invalidity of his disciplinary conviction. See *Shavers v. Stapleton*, No. 03-2210, 2004 WL 1303359, at *1 (6th Cir. June 9, 2004).

Under Michigan law, a prisoner may seek a rehearing of a decision made by the Hearings Division within thirty calendar days after a copy of the misconduct report is received. MICH. COMP. LAWS § 791.254; Policy Directive 03.03.105, ¶ DDD. Upon denial of his motion for rehearing, a prisoner may file an application for leave to appeal in the state circuit court. See MICH. COMP. LAWS § 791.255(2); Policy Directive 03.03.105, ¶ GGG (concerning appeal). If he is not successful, he may then seek to overturn the convictions by bringing a federal habeas corpus action.² Plaintiff's request for a rehearing of his conviction was denied. He does not allege that he took any

²A misconduct conviction results in the loss of good-time credits, which is equivalent to a loss of a "shortened prison sentence." See *Wolff v. McDonnell*, 418 U.S. 539, 556-57 (1974). A challenge to a "shortened prison sentence" is a challenge to the fact or duration of confinement that is properly brought as an action for habeas corpus relief. See *Preiser v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 475 (1973). However, a prisoner must exhaust available state remedies before bringing a habeas corpus action, which would include appealing the conviction through the state courts. See 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b)(1).

further action challenging his misconduct conviction. Accordingly, because Plaintiff has not shown that his conviction has been invalidated, his claim is not presently cognizable. He therefore fails to state a claim on which relief can be granted. *See Morris v. Cason*, No. 02-2460, 2004 WL 1326066 (6th Cir. June 10, 2004) (a claim barred by *Heck* is properly dismissed for failure to state a claim); *Murray v. Evert*, No. 03-1411, 2003 WL 22976618 (6th Cir. Dec. 8, 2003) (same); *Harris v. Truesdell*, No. 03-1440, 2003 WL 22435646 (6th Cir. Oct. 23, 2003) (*Heck*-barred claim fails to state a claim and is frivolous).

D. Damaged Footlocker

Plaintiff also claims that his footlocker was damaged while being packed by prison staff. To the extent Plaintiff intends to raise a due process claim, it is barred by the doctrine of *Parratt v. Taylor*, 451 U.S. 527 (1981), *overruled in part* by *Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327 (1986). Under *Parratt*, a person deprived of property by a “random and unauthorized act” of a state employee has no federal due process claim unless the state fails to afford an adequate post-deprivation remedy. If an adequate post-deprivation remedy exists, the deprivation, although real, is not “without due process of law.” *Parratt*, 451 U.S. at 537. This rule applies to both negligent and intentional deprivation of property, as long as the deprivation was not done pursuant to an established state procedure. *See Hudson v. Palmer*, 468 U.S. 517, 530-36 (1984). Because Plaintiff’s claim is premised upon allegedly unauthorized negligent acts of a state official, he must plead and prove the inadequacy of state post-deprivation remedies. *See Copeland v. Machulis*, 57 F.3d 476, 479-480 (6th Cir. 1995); *Gibbs v. Hopkins*, 10 F.3d 373, 378 (6th Cir. 1993). Under settled Sixth Circuit authority, a prisoner’s failure to sustain this burden requires dismissal of his § 1983 due-process action. *See Brooks v. Dutton*, 751 F.2d 197 (6th Cir. 1985).

Plaintiff has not sustained his burden in this case. Plaintiff has not alleged that state post-deprivation remedies are inadequate. Moreover, numerous state post-deprivation remedies are available to him. First, a prisoner who incurs a loss through no fault of his own may petition the institution's Prisoner Benefit Fund for compensation. MICH. DEP'T OF CORR., Policy Directive 04.07.112 ¶ II(B) (effective Sept. 24, 1998). Aggrieved prisoners may also submit claims for property loss of less than \$1,000 to the State Administrative Board. MICH. COMP. LAWS § 600.6419; Policy Directive, 04.07.112 ¶ II(B). Alternatively, Michigan law authorizes actions in the Court of Claims asserting tort or contract claims "against the state and any of its departments, commissions, boards, institutions, arms, or agencies." MICH. COMP. LAWS § 600.6419(1)(a); *see Green v. State Corrections Dep't*, 192 N.W.2d 491 (Mich. 1971) (state liable for tortious injury sustained by a sentenced convict at the Detroit House of Correction). The Sixth Circuit has specifically held that Michigan provides adequate post-deprivation remedies for deprivation of property. *See Copeland*, 57 F.3d at 480. Plaintiff does not allege any reason why a state-court action would not afford him complete relief for the deprivation, either negligent or intentional, of his personal property. Accordingly, he fails to state a claim arising from his damaged property.

E. Motion for Discovery

Plaintiff has filed a motion for discovery (docket #3). Because Plaintiff fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, his motion will be denied as moot.

Conclusion

Having conducted the review now required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Court determines that Plaintiff's action fails to state a claim and will therefore be dismissed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c).

The Court must next decide whether an appeal of this action would be in good faith within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997). For the same reasons that the Court dismisses the action, the Court discerns no good-faith basis for an appeal. Should Plaintiff appeal this decision, the Court will assess the \$255 appellate filing fee pursuant to § 1915(b)(1), *see McGore*, 114 F.3d at 610-11, unless Plaintiff is barred from proceeding *in forma pauperis*, e.g., by the “three-strikes” rule of § 1915(g). If he is barred, he will be required to pay the \$255 appellate filing fee in one lump sum.

This is a dismissal as described by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

A Judgment consistent with this Opinion will be entered.

Dated: May 4, 2005

/s/ Wendell A. Miles
Wendell A. Miles
Senior U.S. District Judge